# HENNEN'S AMERICAN PUBLIC LIBRARY RATINGS 2008

HAPLR 8" is how I'm dubbing this edition of Hennen's American Public Library Ratings, as they enter their second decade. Although I have tried to avoid doing so, others have frequently called the ratings annual. But the vagaries of federal data reporting have kept that from being the case. The ratings were first published in American Libraries in 1999. "HAPLR 8" corresponds to the current year but only by happenstance.

*By Thomas J. Hennen Jr.*

So what has changed in the statewide outlook over the past four years? New Mexico and Wyoming have increased their standings the most (from 42nd to 31st for New Mexico and from 22nd to 17th for Wyoming). Florida and Hawaii have fallen the most (from 38th to 41st for Hawaii and 30th to 35th for Florida). Ohio, Utah, Oregon, Washington, and Indiana have all maintained their relative spots in the top five. Mississippi, the District of Columbia, Alabama, Tennessee, and Georgia took the bottom five spots for this year's rankings.

The top 10 libraries in each service-population category are listed on the accompanying chart. Ranking number one in their respective slots are six Ohio libraries: Cuyahoga County Public Library (500 K), Lakewood Public Library (50 K), North Canton Public Library (25 K), Twinsburg Public Library (10 K), Columbiana Public Library (5K), and Grand Valley Public Library (2.5 K). The other four in the number-one slot are: Santa Clara County Library in California (250 K), Naperville Public Library in Illinois (100 K), Sodus Free Library in New York (1 K), and Hardtner Public Library in Kansas (less than 1 K).

The "Year-to-Year Changes" chart (see sidebar) compares data for this edition with data from the prior (2006) edition and from the first edition

(1999). Consider some of the changes. On average, for every dollar spent on operating costs, 14 cents is spent on capital. That continues a decade-plus trend of 13 to 15 cents for capital for every dollar of operating expenditures. Total operating expenditures went up 4.2% while collection expenditures declined 0.8%. Circulation continued its multiyear climb with a 2.3% rise. Visits bested the circulation with a 3% increase. Reference answers saw a 0.7% increase, a change from the declines posted in the last several years and still 6.9% ahead of the rate for the 1999 edition.

The most noticeable decline was in the availability of magazine subscriptions per capita, a 4.2% drop. That is probably a testimony to continuing growth in library preference for online sources over their print counterparts. Overall, libraries have 1.9% fewer subscriptions than they did in the 1999 HAPLR edition.

Back in the mid-70s when I went to graduate school, Wheeler and Goldhor's numbers represented the gold standard for library planning when they published *Practical Administration of Public Libraries* in 1962. It was a library school textbook for a long time thereafter. They recommended that 20% of a public library budget should go toward materials. More recently, the common wisdom has pointed to 15%. The latest data shows another in a series of continuing declines, to 13.2%. In the 1999 HAPLR edition it was 15.1%.

Circulation per staff hour is up 2.5% this year and 5.9% since the first edition. Visits per capita and circulation per capita are up again for this edition by a whopping 20.2% and 12.7% respectively from the first edition.

After adjusting for inflation since the first edition, expenditures per item circulated remain about the same at they did nearly 10 years ago. How many public or private enterprises can say that?

First published two years after the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) created its Peer Assessment Tool, the HAPLR ratings rely on six input and nine output measures, compared consistently for each population grouping. The measures are fairly traditional. I thought then, as now, that electronic resources, youth services, and building size ought to be included, but the data for these measures is simply too unreliable for consistent calculation and comparison

I had hoped to publish this eighth edition of HAPLR in fall of 2007 but the release of the necessary data for FY2005 became a problem. A handoff of the statistics-reporting duty from NCES to the Institute of Museum and Library Services had been scheduled for 2007. It appeared at that time that the late publication of FY2005 data by NCES would be followed in just a matter of months by the much earlier-than-usual publication of FY2006 data by IMLS. For that reason, I chose to skip the normal fall 2007 publication in favor of a spring 2008 set of HAPLR ratings based on the FY2006 data. Subsequent events proved that to be a bad decision, because the new IMLS data was not forthcoming. This was not the first time it became necessary to skip a year of HAPLR reports because of a delay in federal data. I had to do so back in 2004 because the FY2002 data was

YEAR-TO-YEAR CHANGES...

| Data | HAPLR 2008 | HAPLR 1999 | HAPLR 2006 |
|---|---|---|---|
| Number of Libraries | 9,076 | 3.7% | -0.2% |
| Population | 285,579,896 | 10.1% | 1.1% |
| Staff FTE | 136,014 | 15.5% | -0.1% |
| Collection Expenditure | $1,142,839,506 | 35.9% | -0.8% |
| Total Expenditure | $8,632,693,011 | 55.5% | 4.2% |
| Book Volumes | 803,013,857 | 13.2% | 0.4% |
| Periodical Subscriptions | 1,820,422 | -1.8% | -4.2% |
| Hours Open | 35,915,538 | 8.5% | -2.3% |
| Visits | 1,320,647,162 | 30.4% | 3.0% |
| Reference | 303,914,504 | 6.9% | 0.7% |
| Circulation | 2,008,090,565 | 22.3% | 2.3% |
| Expenditure per capita | $30.23 | 41.3% | 3.0% |
| Percent Budget to materials | 13.2% | -12.6% | -4.8% |
| Materials Expend Per capita | $4.00 | 23.5% | -1.9% |
| FTE staff per 1000 population | 0.48 | 5.0% | -1.2% |
| Periodicals per 1000 residents | 6.37 | -10.8% | -5.3% |
| Volumes per Capita | 2.81 | 2.8% | -0.8% |
| Operating Expend. per circulation | $4.30 | 27.1% | 1.8% |
| Visits per capita | 4.62 | 18.5% | 1.8% |
| Book Collection turnover | 2.50 | 8.1% | 2.0% |
| Circulation per FTE Staff Hour | 7.10 | 5.9% | 2.5% |
| Circulation per Capita | 7.03 | 11.1% | 1.2% |
| Reference per capita | 1.06 | -2.9% | -0.4% |
| Circulation per hour | 55.91 | 12.7% | 4.8% |
| Visits per hour | 36.77 | 20.2% | 5.4% |
| Circulation per visit | 1.52 | -6.2% | -0.6% |

## TOP 10 LIBRARIES IN 10 POPULATION CATEGORIES

| Pop | Rank | Library | State | Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 500,000 | 1 | Cuyahoga County Public Library | OH | 861 |
| | 2 | Multnomah County Library | OR | 855 |
| | 3 | Columbus Metropolitan Library | OH | 848 |
| | 4 | Denver Public Library | CO | 842 |
| | 5 | Baltimore County Public Library | MD | 807 |
| | 6 | Hennepin County Library | MN | 802 |
| | 7 | Salt Lake County Library System | UT | 789 |
| | 8 | Cincinnati And Hamilton County, Pl Of | OH | 751 |
| | 9 | Pikes Peak Library District | CO | 738 |
| | 10 | Montgomery County Public Libraries | MD | 735 |
| 250,000 | 1 | Santa Clara County Library | CA | 915 |
| | 2 | Howard County Library | MD | 897 |
| | 3 | Saint Charles City-County Library District | MO | 868 |
| | 4 | Johnson County Library | KS | 839 |
| | 5 | Madison Public Library | WI | 811 |
| | 6 | Stark County District Library | OH | 786 |
| | 7 | Lincoln City Libraries | NE | 768 |
| | 8 | Toledo-Lucas County Public Library | OH | 735 |
| | 9 | Allen County Public Library | IN | 729 |
| | 10 | Chesterfield County Public Library | VA | 727 |
| 100,000 | 1 | Naperville P.L. | IL | 923 |
| | 2 | Monroe County Public Library | IN | 879 |
| | 3 | Santa Clara City Library | CA | 873 |
| | 4 | Medina County District Library | OH | 870 |
| | 5 | Arapahoe Library District | CO | 861 |
| | 6 | St Joseph County Public Library | IN | 855 |
| | 7 | Douglas County Libraries | CO | 852 |
| | 8 | Middletown Public Library | OH | 846 |
| | 9 | Salt Lake City Public Library | UT | 845 |
| | 10 | Loudoun County Public Library | VA | 844 |
| 50,000 | 1 | Lakewood Public Library | OH | 956 |
| | 2 | Washington-Centerville Public Library | OH | 954 |
| | 3 | Carmel Clay Public Library | IN | 915 |
| | 4 | Euclid Public Library | OH | 907 |
| | 5 | Cleveland Heights-University Heights Pl | OH | 899 |
| | 6 | Newton Free Library | MA | 899 |
| | 7 | Worthington Public Library | OH | 888 |
| | 8 | Willoughby-Eastlake Public Library | OH | 884 |
| | 9 | Wheaton P.L. | IL | 881 |
| | 10 | Palatine P.L.D. | IL | 878 |
| 25,000 | 1 | North Canton Public Library | OH | 929 |
| | 2 | Porter Public Library | OH | 926 |
| | 3 | Wadsworth Public Library | OH | 900 |
| | 4 | Upper Arlington Public Library | OH | 898 |
| | 5 | Southwest Public Libraries | OH | 894 |
| | 6 | St Charles P.L.D. | IL | 881 |
| | 7 | Suffern Free Library | NY | 881 |
| | 8 | Lake Oswego Public Library | OR | 880 |
| | 9 | Elmhurst P.L. | IL | 871 |
| | 10 | Massillon Public Library | OH | 869 |

fatally flawed: One of the largest states in the nation failed to report any data for that year, so we skipped a year of HAPLR reports. As soon as the FY2006 data is released by IMLS, I will begin working on the next edition, which I hope it will be available in the first half of 2009. For now, accept my apology that this eighth edition is a year later than I would have preferred.

When I started my library career, no survey by ALA—or indeed any other organization—would have asked the public whether or not they thought public libraries would continue to be needed in the future. But by the turn of this millennium, it became a standard question to all those op-ed writers speculating about the internet replacing what librarians do. The 2006 *American Library Association @ your library: Attitudes Toward Public Libraries Survey* shows that 90% of the public says yes, they need us more than ever, the internet notwithstanding. But the scrutiny about what we do and how well we do it will continue to grow. This is one of the main reasons that in the last decade we have seen an increase in attempts at rating public libraries. The public and the profession want to know: How can we demonstrate our worth? How do we measure the results of our investment in libraries? A number of efforts have been undertaken over the past 11 years:

**NCES Peer Assessment Tool** The NCES established the Peer Assessment Tool in 1997. This online tool is now the responsibility of the Institute of Museum and Library Services and available at harvester.census.gov/imls/. The tool lets library planners set parameters and come up with peer libraries that the library specifies. Although it is useful for many purposes, the learning curve is somewhat steep and the number of options and variables can be overwhelming.

**BIX, German Library Index** In 1999, the same year that HAPLR was introduced, the Bertelsman Foundation sponsored BIX (Der Bibliotheksindex) to compare libraries in Germany. BIX uses many of the same measures as HAPLR, but there are three major differences. First, the German project is voluntary and libraries must pay to participate. Second, the project provides for measures from year to year, often called a longitudinal analysis. Third, BIX rat-

## TOP 10 LIBRARIES IN 10 POPULATION CATEGORIES

| Pop | Rank | Library | State | Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10,000 | 1 | Twinsburg Public Library | OH | 954 |
| | 2 | Wickliffe Public Library | OH | 937 |
| | 3 | Hays Public Library | KS | 926 |
| | 4 | Way Public Library | OH | 917 |
| | 5 | Rocky River Public Library | OH | 907 |
| | 6 | Peters Township Public Library | PA | 900 |
| | 7 | Orrville Public Library | OH | 897 |
| | 8 | Darien Library | CT | 895 |
| | 9 | Dover Public Library | OH | 886 |
| | 10 | Brown Deer Public Library | WI | 885 |
| 5,000 | 1 | Columbiana Public Library | OH | 956 |
| | 2 | Bridgeport Public Library | WV | 926 |
| | 3 | Wright Memorial Public Library | OH | 925 |
| | 4 | Kinsman Free Public Library | OH | 921 |
| | 5 | New Cumberland Public Library | PA | 903 |
| | 6 | Bristol Public Library | OH | 902 |
| | 7 | Crestline Public Library | OH | 900 |
| | 8 | St. Helena Public Library | CA | 887 |
| | 9 | Lee Memorial Library | NJ | 883 |
| | 10 | Dover Town Library | MA | 881 |
| 2,500 | 1 | Grand Valley Public Library | OH | 933 |
| | 2 | Mt. Pleasant Public Library | UT | 921 |
| | 3 | Bell Memorial Public Library | IN | 912 |
| | 4 | James Kennedy Public Library | IA | 910 |
| | 5 | Yoakum County/Cecil Bickley Library | TX | 896 |
| | 6 | Pelican Rapids Public Library: A Multi | MN | 894 |
| | 7 | Tracy Memorial Library | NH | 890 |
| | 8 | East Palestine Memorial Public Library | OH | 886 |
| | 9 | Ewell Free Library | NY | 884 |
| | 10 | Falconer Public Library | NY | 881 |
| 1,000 | 1 | Sodus Free Library | NY | 934 |
| | 2 | Flomaton Public Library | AL | 929 |
| | 3 | Centerburg Public Library | OH | 907 |
| | 4 | Riceville Public Library | IA | 902 |
| | 5 | Utica P.L.D. | IL | 891 |
| | 6 | Seneca Free Library | KS | 890 |
| | 7 | Edgerton: Runals Memorial Library | MN | 887 |
| | 8 | Dike Public Library | IA | 880 |
| | 9 | Upton County Public Library | TX | 880 |
| | 10 | Conrad Public Library | IA | 880 |
| >1,000 | 1 | Hardtner Public Library | KS | 907 |
| | 2 | Mary E. Tippitt Memorial Library | TN | 895 |
| | 3 | New Woodstock Free Library | NY | 890 |
| | 4 | Poland Public Library | NY | 888 |
| | 5 | Washburn Public Library | TN | 888 |
| | 6 | Raquette Lake Free Library | NY | 887 |
| | 7 | Aquinnah Public Library | MA | 884 |
| | 8 | Meadow Grove Public Library | NE | 878 |
| | 9 | Silverton Public Library | CO | 876 |
| | 10 | Clayville Library Association | NY | 874 |

ings include employee retention as a positive measure of employee satisfaction, a factor that the U.S. data has never included. As planned, the BIX project was turned over to the German Library Association in 2005.

**Audit Commission Reports, U.K.**
In 2000, Great Britain adopted national library standards, and the Audit Commission began publishing both summary annual reports of library conditions and individualized ratings of libraries. Audit Commission personnel base the reports on statistical data, long-range plans, local government commitment to the library, and a site visit. The Audit Commission is an independent body. Every library is assigned a score. The scoring chart displays performance in two dimensions. A horizontal axis shows how good the service is at present, on a scale ranging from no stars for poor to three stars for excellent. A vertical axis shows the improvement prospects over time of the service, also on a four-point scale. "Building Better Library Systems" is available at www.audit-commission.gov.uk. From the data on the website, however, the project appears to have stalled after 2001.

**Bibliostat** Begun in 1998 and acquired by Baker and Taylor in 2000, Bibliostat Connect is a tool that provides access to national, proprietary, and local summary statistics for public library peer comparisons. Bibliostat Connect's annual subscription prices of $300 to $4,500 are based on a subscribing library's population. A number of states use the software for collecting annual statistics for their public libraries.

**Normative Data Project** Before it was launched in 2005, I reviewed the Normative Data Project for *American Libraries* (April 2005, p. 81). Sponsored by SirsiDynix, the integrated library system vendor, the project promised to meld library data, demographic data, and even GIS (geographic information systems) information into a seamless product available to libraries for analysis and planning. I wrote at the time that the project seemed very promising, but that I was concerned that the company only let me see the prototype data as presented by the developers rather than letting me drive the product myself. (For the

information that was presented at the time, see SirsiDynix's February 2005 *OneSource* newsletter.) Alas, since the introduction of the Normative Data Project and my review, the company appears to have abandoned this very promising project.

**Gannet Database** Gannett News Service released a searchable database July 17 (*AL*, Sept., p. 30) that compares trends affecting public library systems between 2002 and 2006. The analysis used NCES data as well as more current statistics collected directly from state library data coordinators, compared figures for about 9,200 library systems, and found that library visits increased by roughly 10% during that five-year period and circulation of materials rose by 9%. Database users can select a library system from a drop-down list of counties by state to learn about changes in book and video circulation, number of visits, operating expenses, and the number of public-use computers.

The intent is to provide newspapers in the Gannett chain with information on libraries that local newspapers can use to highlight comparative data about libraries in their media market. As I see it, the problem with the Gannett database is that it does not provide sufficient data to make broad comparative analyses of a given library to other libraries.

A fair number of newspapers have already used the Gannett Library Systems Database for local newspaper articles, but comparative data and analysis are lacking because of the limitations of the product. The Gannett News Service Library Systems Database is available at data.gannettnewsservice .com/libraries/library_start.php.

## HAPLR vs. LJ Index

For years, critics of HAPLR have argued that these ratings are improperly done and, in fact, should not be done at all, asserting that libraries, unique among American institutions, are just too local to be judged nationally. Recently, however, *Library Journal* announced that two of those critics, with backing from Bibliostat, plan to publish the "LJ Index." They are calling it "a new ranking system that focuses more transparently on ranking libraries based on their performance." They say it will scrutinize "only such statistics that describe library service outputs, such as visits, circulation, public internet computer usage, and program attendance." It will exclude "resource inputs, such as staffing levels, collection size, and revenues and expenditures." In announcing their new ranking system in *LJ*, Keith Curry Lance and Ray Lyons said, "Inputs, we believe, do not measure library performance.

**"Many libraries have noted that you get what you pay for as a community.".**

That is why we emphasize outputs, which indicate some of the services people receive from libraries." It will be interesting to see how the LJ Index rankings then differ from the position of those same libraries in HAPLR.

A part of me wishes that I hadn't chosen so many factors or weighted them when developing HAPLR. It certainly seems that the LJ Index will be easier to calculate—four factors as opposed to 15 and no weighting of the factors. I chose to use both input factors and output factors for HAPLR; what a community brings to the table in spending per capita, books per capita, and staffing levels matters. One also must judge some factors more important to the equation than others, but by refusing to weight factors, Lance and Lyons make all factors equal. Are the number of actual visits, circulation, electronic uses, and program attendance really equal in importance? Don't some things we do in libraries cost more and count for more than others?

Both LJ Index authors have berated me about the variations that result from using per-capita measures. They lament that when one moves from one population category to another the ratings change in HAPLR. But, as far as I can tell, the same thing will happen for the LJ Index. One is tempted to ask why what is good, or bad, for the HAPLR goose is perfectly okay for the LJ Index gander.

In "The Trouble with Hennen," published in the Nov. 15, 1999 *Library Journal*, Oregon State Librarian Jim Scheppke criticized the HAPLR methodology for using outputs rather than his preferred method of inputs only. We should judge libraries on what they have to offer in terms of available staffing, materials, and building size, he said. But what will he say of the LJ Index that ignores those factors?

Lance and Lyons talk about not wanting to use funding per capita as a factor. They assert in the June 15 *Library Journal* that "few potential rankings users would welcome the news that their libraries topped rankings on staffing, collection size, or—least of all—funding. While such rankings should be something to brag about in an ideal world, in these tight economic times, they could invite cuts on the rationale that the library would still have 'nothing to complain about,' or that maintaining outputs despite input cuts (a doubtful eventuality) would represent an improvement in the library's 'efficiency.' *For these reasons, we chose to leave input measures out of the LJ Index*" [emphasis mine].

## Using input measures

I read this criticism of using input measures while visiting Cuyahoga County, where that is exactly what they were doing. Cuyahoga County Library Director (and vice-president of ALA's Public Library Association) Sari Feldman is leading her library's push for a bond issue for operating and capital expenses. Their campaign is based, in part, on their great HAPLR scores. These are scores that include high spending and other output measures that are matched by comparably high usage (output measures). High investment equals high yield. Cuyahoga has a lot of company. Many libraries have noted that you get what you pay for as a community. Most of the time, the more a community puts into a library the more its residents receive. If that is not a message for our times, what is? HAPLR presents the balance between inputs and outputs. The LJ Index wants us to avoid the issues. But what was the reason again? Is it to protect libraries, taxpayers, or who exactly? Have they suppressed information to protect libraries regardless of the consequences? Or, protect libraries at the expense of information? Neither formulation looks all that good from the perspective of a respect for the free flow of information that one might expect from our profession.

Lance and Lyons talk about not using the input measure of spending because some libraries in small towns don't capture all the personnel costs. But then they want to use program attendance as a measure, even though a library may have no space to program.

Now let's have a word about those statistical and philosophical justifications for a clean use of just four variables: Here is what happens with statistical theory that I believe does not work in the real world of library services. Total spending by a library on a per capita basis and just the materials spending per capita *almost* always go together. Because that is so, the LJ Index would have us abandon one or the other measure. But here is where it matters in the real library world: sometimes a library has a lot of money per capita but devotes very little of it to buying materials. I continue to judge that a bad thing. The LJ Index authors' statistics and philosophy would have us ignore it.

Providing that all other things are equal, which they rarely are, and looking at things from only the big picture perspective, they might be right. But—and this is what is important—the HAPLR ratings judge things at the *library* level. That way, the disparity between total spending and materials spending per capita speaks, one can only say, volumes. ▮

**Learn more about HAPLR @ www.haplr-index.com.**